

Israel and the Bible (Connecting Israel with the Message of the Bible)

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In many ways, Israel is in the center of the Word of God and His revelation to the World.

The message of the Gospel, the Word of the Lord went forth from Jerusalem to the ends of the World. This task started with the first disciples and community of believers to establish God's body and bring salvation to people of all nations – and forever changed the world.

However, the Word of God also reveals that there is yet a prophecy to be fulfilled: “And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:3).

Between these two, we live today much closer to the second one than to the first. We also live in a special prophetic time in History in which, after 2000 years, there is a main presence of the People of Israel again in the land of Israel, in the form of a vibrant, advanced, democratic and open society, with Hebrew as their main language.

There is no doubt in my heart and mind that it is for a time such as this that we should unite in spirit and action to bring God's Living Word back to the people of the book and to the land from which it initially went to the ends of the world. So that His brothers will meet and recognize their Messiah, Yeshua (Jesus), as their personal savior and to bring back to the House of Jacob the message that their Messiah is alive and with Him there is Life.

In this God given ministry, we seek the wisdom, guidance, provision and protection of the Lord.

Bringing and revealing the message of the Bible to Israel – so that lives will be changed and souls be saved, requires that we understand and relate both to the strategic and the real time needs and opportunities. We strive to develop and implement the most effective and impact yielding tools and solutions for the different groups and populations. This definitely include the wide community of believers in Israel since as we grow and deepen our knowledge in the Word of God, we also widen and strengthen our capability and ways to further proclaim it to others. Let's not forget that a face to face interaction, a personal testimony, might be God's revelation to someone's heart.

Different than in many Christian countries, in Israel, there is no official denominational Church structure or hierarchy. Therefore, the important need for consultation, support, integration of efforts as well as actual outreach, as much as possible, is being done through and in cooperation with the National Evangelistic Committee.

Examples from the work of The Bible Society in Israel

While we proclaim, open and initiate engagement with the Word of God. We always remember that it is the work of the holy spirit that convince the heart of a person.

The first Hebrew Cross Reference Bible:

Cross Reference Bible is a very common and familiar tool in many languages and for a long time. It is a basic yet effective tool for Bible study. In English alone there are more than 250 different Cross Reference and study Bibles.

However, although an original Bible language, a Hebrew Cross Reference Bible was never produced. The reason being that Jews traditionally use rabbinical commentaries for Bible study. There was a great need for a tool that will objectively open and light up the Word of God to the people of the book so that they will be able to better understand the Bible - through the Bible. This tool is excellent also to show the unity between the Old and the New Testaments, especially when it comes to the messianic prophecies (Gen 3, 12, 49, Isaiah 40, 42, 49, 53, Psalms 2, 22, 41 etc etc) fulfilled in the Messiah.

Thinking of both believing and non believing audience, we developed and added specific aid tools in this production:

1. List Jewish traditional weekly Torah (“Parashot”) and Prophet (“Haftarot”) readings – as well as the main topics in each of the weekly portions.
2. A proposed process for Bible study.
3. Yearly reading plan – with a special order of the readings.
4. The Messianic Prophecies of the Old Testament – presenting God’s Plan of Salvation with its fulfillment from the New Testament. A thorough study in which main issues are dealt with that relate to Jewish audience. Few examples are: 1. that the Messiah will give himself out of His own will to suffering and death. 2. The Complex Unity of God. 3. Atonement and forgiveness of sins is only through the blood of the sacrifice. 4. Jesus fulfils once and for all, the sacrifices of the Law.
5. Rabbinical references to the above Messianic Prophecies. The main purpose in this Appendix is to show that also amongst Jewish great Rabbis there were those who understood these Prophecies to be speaking about the Messiah. This is especially important for outreach as well as for helping our own young believers in Israel to defend their faith and identity as Jewish followers of Christ. Young believers sometimes have more opportunities to share and explain their faith! as they interact much more than adults.
6. Index of places where the reader will find expanded cross references on specific subjects.
7. Bible Timeline.
8. 12 colored Maps.

In addition to being an excellent study tool, it becomes an effective outreach tool.

Following is a testimony we received from a believer who used this Bible for outreach:

“I had purchased a number of the new cross-reference Bibles to hand out to my friends. However, I realized that I needed to stop into a store and get supplies for the meeting. When I came in, I had a brief conversation with the person working at the store. He's basically an observant Israeli but he hasn't spent much time until now examining Judaism. In any event, he noticed the books I was carrying and asked me about them. I explained to him that I was a Bible teacher and that those books were gifts for some of the people I work with. As we talked, he found out that I taught both the Old and New Testament, and I mentioned to him that those books were actually Bibles that showed the connection between the Old and New Testaments and that they had some other charts and things in them and that they were all in Hebrew. At that point, he got really interested in them and asked to see one. I opened one up and showed him the cross-reference and some of the charts on messianic prophecies and he got really interested in it. It led to another conversation and he asked me for my card or a phone number so he could talk to me again, he also invited me to come back and visit with him for some more discussion about the Bible and other things. I agreed and came back a few weeks later. When I came back, he asked if I had brought him one of those "nice Bibles" and offered to trade

me for some of the products in his store that I used if I got him one. We talked about several things and I showed him the cross-reference system. We talked some more and then I left, not before I traded him one copy, but I told him I'd be back some time. Pray for him, that he may see the truth and the Messiah.”

Real, virtual and media

Real and Virtual are not necessarily contradictions. Through Internet and technology, growing communication, engagement and interaction are constantly moving from the real to the virtual. The benefits are important and include fast, easy, wide and discrete exposure to most population (except elderly?). In addition to the importance of reaching people where they are, beyond physical and geographical limitations, through the Internet (with all its different applications, including social networks), it also provide a way to reach out to the “un/less-reached” populations such as Orthodox Jews. Data shows hundreds of thousands if not Millions of visits and searches of messianic related topics. Occasionally we receive an email with a testimony of how our web site was used for outreach – including for Jews outside Israel. Another side to this is the growing desire of people to a real and human interaction and the elderly population to be considered.

The Bible Society in Israel in cooperation with Faith Comes By Hearing, produced in 2009 a fully dramatized audio recording of the New Testament available both on CD and Internet. It provides the possibility to listen to the Hebrew New Testament basically everywhere. Special attention was given to clarity of language and correct pronunciation. The result is that it becomes not only a tool to hear the New Testament but also to better understand it.

The work on the Old Testament audio production started at the beginning of 2011 and will most likely require all of 2012 in funds will be available. Once the whole Bible is recorded, it will enable creation of further outreach materials such as Messianic Prophecies of the Old Testament with the fulfillment in the New Testament – in audio.

The Media in all of its forms has many more outreach opportunities that are still not fully utilized for Israel. How about real time and on demand engagement with believers? Integration and cooperation are key in this kind of outreach, definitely with the Messianic student movement. An advanced Hebrew Scripture web site is also still waiting to be created (work started but requires resources).

“...The natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree” (Rom 11:24)

Although the majority of the Israeli population and society of today is not categorized as religious, most Israelis still hold to their Jewish identity. In an Israeli terminology or slang they might describe themselves as tradition keepers or “Light Seculars”. In addition, Rabbinical Jewish approach to messianic Judaism is very negative and influence beyond Orthodox or religious circles. Revealing and teaching the Jewish biblical roots of the messianic faith is still a great and important tool! In many cases it creates a bridge and basis for a scripture based dialogue about our faith. It also help in breaking and educating about some prejudice and mis-conceptions towards the Christian faith while relating to the meaning of being a Jewish follower of Christ – a great and important challenge by-itself. The Bible Society in Israel recently produced several Hebrew scripture based materials that use this approach. Following are two examples:

The Messianic Psalms: The book of Psalms is the most widely read of all books of the Bible, even by many Jews who do not consider themselves particularly religious. In this production of the book of Psalms we marked the many messianic verses in red and included a list of Old Testament messianic prophecies with their fulfillment in the New Testament at the end. It clearly reveals that Yeshua fully

fit to be the messiah that the book of Psalms points to and prophecy about. The Hebrew and Russian editions are completed and there are plans to produce the Amharic edition.

The Divinity of The Messiah: This booklet examines the claims of Jesus of Nazareth as appears in the New Testament in light of Old Testament Scriptures and Rabbinical Writings. It shows and makes the case that everything Jesus did and said about Himself is fully aligned with what the Old Testament prophesied that the Messiah will be and do.

The above productions and more, are also available for reading on our web site under a category of Free Scripture Resources". Amongst the Orthodox Jews there are those who truly seek the truth even in the New Testament. It provides discrete access for those who would be hesitant to be seen with a printed New Testament or Messianic materials.

“That all of them may be one...so that the world may believe that you have sent me”

What a powerful testimony is promised through our unity in Yeshua. How much more when this unity is amongst and between Jewish and Arab believers and how much more now, amidst the changes and events taking place in the Middle East and beyond. It is both a challenge and a mirror to the Jewish and Arab body of believers.

The Bible Society in Israel started a production of an Arabic/Hebrew Diglot. The purpose is to promote unity and mobilize mutual evangelism. Another project “I am my Brothers’ keeper” is carried out in partnership between the Israeli, Arab Israeli and Palestinian Bible Societies, and is a non political devotional that is written by many Arab and Jewish believers. The names of the authors are not published so that the focus will be on the power that unite us – Yeshua, the Living Word.

In spite and in light of the different obstacles and barriers, reconciliation and unity efforts are carried out by and reflect the desire of many Jewish and Arab believers to live and enjoy the blessing of our fellowship and unity in Yeshua.

Educating and promoting the topic of Israel and the Bible – with all of its aspects - amongst believers world wide, becomes more and more important and affect the outreach to Israel.

Bible Advocacy, bringing the Bible to the center of Society

In our (post) modern society, the Bible becomes more and more identified with religion and the opposite of progress and modernization. How can we advocate the content and values of the Bible and bring it to the center of our day to day modern social lives? There are many ways, and one of them is through Art. The Bible Society in Israel, in cooperation with the Arab Israeli and Palestinian Bible Societies, and in partnership with the British Bible Society are now in a process of identifying the themes and artistic methods to bring relevant Bible values to specific central locations. This can promote other Bible based dialogues.

The above are only some examples and directions regarding bringing the Bible in Israel. They definitely do not include the variety of efforts taking place by the larger body of believers both in and out of Israel. There is still much place for simple, sincere and creative sharing. Thousands of New Testaments and Gospels are constantly needed and printed for outreach. I did not mention many other efforts such as the outreach to young Israelis traveling abroad that can be further developed.

May the Lord guide and bless our efforts to speak and proclaim the truth about Yeshua to Israel, in Love, for their salvation.

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